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The image of woman in philosophy



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## The Witches of the Reich: The Dimension of Female Mysticism in Nazi Ideology

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### **Abstract**

The article investigates the rich, but also ambivalent phenomenon of female mysticism within the context of the Nazi ideology. The Third Reich showed two positions towards women who were interested in the sector or the spiritual area. On the one hand, some forms of mysticism were incorporated into the nationalist and racial narrative of the regime; on the other hand, women who were linked to independent spiritual movements were often looked at with a good deal of skepticism, and at times, persecuted. Of particular interest is the position of Heinrich Himmler, who wanted to ‘renew’ the medieval witch-hunt as proof of a ‘lost’ Germanic tradition, while the regime prohibited other activities like astrology and theosophy. From a philosophical point of view, the article aims to explain how these policies are a manifestation of a larger fear of the Nazi regime towards independent female spirituality and its possibilities of knowledge, freedom, and power.

**Keywords:** *Mysticism, National Socialism, Occultism, Philosophy, Gender, Ideology, Suppression, Esotericism*

## Introduction

Mysticism was the most controversial part of Nazi ideology, for it came to be combined with both propaganda and Third Reich cultural conditioning. Of all its parts, that between mysticism and feminine spirituality is particularly melodramatic, for at some times the Nazi rhetoric included and accommodated it and at others sought to suppress it actively. Here, the image of the "witch" occupied a singular position both in Nazi ideology and in philosophical constructs of gender and spirituality. The witch existed as a doubly symbolic figure: insofar as she represented ancient Germanic spirituality destroyed by Nazi ideology, she was something lost to be found again; as a force beyond control and malevolent, however, she needed to be held down.

SS leader Heinrich Himmler took an interest in medieval persecutions of witches and interpreted them as evidence for a mass annihilation of the "true" German spiritual masters by Christianity and Aryan enemies of the race. According to this, the Nazi regime had special archives of information on the persecutions of witches, viewing them as the victims of some historical conspiracy directed against the German people. At the same time, however, the Nazi apparatus imposed strict control over mystical and occult practice and held that independent female spirituality was incompatible with the regime's need for ideological discipline. The female questing for esoteric knowledge and wielding occult power was perceived as a potentially dangerous figure, because she overstepped the boundaries of her function as guardian of racial purity and mother. Thus, Nazism found itself in a contradictory position: while it attempted to revive some sort of prehistoric Germanic spiritual heritage, it attempted to repress all forms of female mystical pursuits not within its domain.

### The Role of Mysticism in Nazi Ideology

The Nazism ideology synthesized a range of mystical and occult elements, most of which drew on German esoteric traditions, Theosophy, Ariosophy, and Pan-Germanism. There was a "primordial" German religiosity revived in the Third Reich, the ideological foundation on which it established its racially purified concept of identity. Racial identity, then, as the Nazi regime fantasized it, was not only a biological or anthropological construction, but also one that was elevated to the spiritual realm and was required in order for the "true" German people to be reborn. In keeping with this logic, ancient German spirituality was interpreted as a higher, pre-Christian wisdom corrupted by foreign contamination.<sup>1</sup>

The reassertion of this spirituality was necessary to the re-establishment of a lost "balance" and national consciousness, as racial purity must be coupled with the re-establishment of a "pure" form of thought and belief.<sup>2</sup>

A revival of this spirituality was held to be essential to the restoration of a lost "balance" and a consolidation of national consciousness, insofar as racial purity had to be matched by the recovery of a "pure" mode of thinking and believing. Its focal point was the connection to the ancient pagan traditions of the Germanic and Scandinavian peoples, recorded in the Eddas, the Sagas, and the prehistoric ritual symbols of the ancestors of the Aryan peoples. This appeal to the beginnings was not merely a cultural enterprise but a search for spiritual rebirth, in which old mythological myths and rituals were interpreted as power codes, organically linked with the German "soul." Particular emphasis was placed on concepts of destiny (Wyrd), honor (Ehre), ancestor worship (Ahnenkult), and belief in the metaphysical space of blood (Blutmystik), which was

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<sup>1</sup> Goodrick-Clarke, N. *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology*. New York 1993: NUY Press

<sup>2</sup> Kurlander, E. *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich*. New Haven 2017: Yale University Press.

perceived as the carrier of genetic along with spiritual heritage.<sup>3</sup>

The return to the ancient symbols was an essential element of this spirituality, since it was the retrieval of an obtuse wisdom inherent in the magical nature of writing and language. The runic tradition, through its inscribed inscriptions and ritual uses, was a kind of primordial veritas capable of calling upon the cosmic powers and re-opening communication with the lost principles of the Aryo-Germanic heritage. Some of the runes were believed to be bearers of power and energy, and their usage spread from war ceremonies to daily activities that sought to reinforce "racial memory."<sup>4</sup>

Parallel with this, the religiosity of ancient Germans was conceived as having an intimate relation to nature and the cycles of nature. That earth was conceived as a sacred material and vehicle of racial consciousness served to reemphasize the close link between the race and the soil, the cycles of the year, and nature's materials. Sacred hills, forests, and rivers were infused with metaphysical significance as loci of initiation and rebirth within. It also explained the obsession with bringing back rituals at the solstices, harvest festivals, and festivals marking the change of season as symbolic ceremonies of rebirth of the country.<sup>5</sup>

This prehistoric spirituality was not static, nor was it confined to religious ceremonies. Instead, it was conceived of as an ongoing connection that had to be reestablished not just through ceremonies and symbols, but also through the cultivation of an interior spiritual discipline. The most ideal representation of such revival was the individual who was able to attune himself to the ancient teachings of power, dignity, and purity of faith, freeing themselves of all outside influence which can corrupt their genuine attunement with the destiny of the race. The women affiliated with the above were greeted with

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<sup>3</sup> Hakl, H. T. *Unknown Sources: National Socialism and the Occult*. London 2001: Holmes Pub Group Llc

<sup>4</sup> Flowers, S. E. *The Northern Dawn: A History of the Reawakening of the Germanic Spirit*. Zurich, 2017: Arcana Europa Media LLC

<sup>5</sup> Pennick, N. *Runic Lore and Legend: Wyrdstaves of Old Northumbria*. London 2019: Destiny Books

ambivalence. On the other hand, there were women who were regarded as bearers of "ancient knowledge" and identified with the mother goddess and the nationalist renaissance of Germanic heritage. They were incorporated into a broader discourse that portrayed them as priestesses of ancestral wisdom, capable of transmitting the spiritual heritage of the German nation. These women were described as having an inner connection with natural and metaphysical powers and, therefore, to act as intermediaries between ancestors and the living world. Here, the female figure assumed the position of divine protector of the land and the people, paralleling the matriarchal cults of ancient Germanic societies and emphasizing the woman's role as the source of life and spiritual continuity.<sup>6</sup>

This was a pre-Christian mythology and myth origin of the relationship, in which the woman's presence was not just passive but active as the owner of mystical and cosmic forces. The woman's identification with nature and the cycles of life were given some importance, as they were said to be the cause of racial as well as spiritual equilibrium. In this construct, the mother goddess in the form of Frigg, Freyja, or the more general notion of feminine deity was attributed as a symbol of ancient order, fertility, and wisdom pertaining to the ancestral legacy of the German people. However, the cult image of woman as goddess did not necessarily correspond with an improvement in her political or social status. On the other hand, whereas Nazi ideology for a time absorbed some of the features of female mysticism, it also required strict separation between what could be allowed to women in their sphere and independent exercises of religiousness on their own part. The woman could be worshiped as guardian of life and tradition, but her intimate participation in occult or mystic practice beyond the reach of the regime was unthinkable.<sup>7</sup>

There were, of course, women who practiced occult or theosophical belief not included in the official state orthodoxy and towards which they were met with suspicion or even hostility.

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<sup>6</sup> Rosenberg, A. *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*. München 1930: Hohenstein-Verlag

<sup>7</sup> Koonz, Claudia. *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics*. New York 1987: St. Martin's Press.

Their spiritual practices, far from being recognized as a means of upholding the German spiritual tradition, were perceived as threatening the ideological discipline the Nazi regime sought to exercise. Women who indulged in spiritualism, astrology, mediumship, or theosophy were typically stigmatized and persecuted because these forms of spirituality were seen as corrupting influences or as indicators of foreign influence.<sup>8</sup>

This paradox represents the inner tension of the Nazi reaction to women's mysticism: it valued its significance as a link with the "lost" ancestral heritage on the one hand, yet constrained women's spiritual autonomy on the other hand, fearing independent practice or reading that would disrupt the regime's narrowly circumscribed ideological schema. So the woman was only received as a bearer of a mysticism that was beneficial to the state narrative and supported nationalist and racial identity but not as an autonomous initiate or keeper of an autonomous esoteric tradition.<sup>9</sup>

On the contrary, the Christian and rationalistic dogma of the Nazi state perceived mystical activities as a threat to the new "scientific" and militarized order since they brought in an uncontrollable, irrational factor which was able to destroy strict discipline and the operability of the state apparatus. While Nazi ideology drew selectively from mysticism, it was a technocratic and militaristic ideology in which science and biology were to be employed for the establishment and preservation of racial purity by the state. Any form of independent spiritual quest that would divert the individual from this rigorously defined ideology was seen as a disruptive element, likely to destabilize the nation.<sup>10</sup>

Christian rhetoric, specifically the more traditional types, had a symbiotic but competitive relationship with the Nazi state. The Nazi state liked Christianity's role to morally discipline the masses along with maintaining a strict social order

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<sup>8</sup> Treitel, C. *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern*. Baltimore 2004: Johns Hopkins University Press.

<sup>9</sup> Sherrat Y. Hitler's Philosophers. New Haven 2013: Yale University Press.

<sup>10</sup> Rosenberg, A. *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*. Munich 2011: Hohenstein-Verlag.

by hierarchy and obedience to authority. However, there were certain Christian values, in specific ones that promoted universal brotherhood, charity, and individual morality, which stood against the absolute racial and statist logic of Nazism. The outcome was the embrace of a secularized form of Christianity that was discipline-oriented and focused on national unity, and diluted those aspects that had the potential to resist the ideology of the state.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, the rationalist Nazi state ideology expressed in its biopolitics and racial hygiene policies demanded exclusion of any "irrational" practice that could not be incorporated in the official state epistemology. Idealization of science as a means of society governing and racial heritage rendered mystical practices unacceptable because they could neither be confirmed nor controlled according to Nazi criteria of scientific legitimacy. Thus, such activities as divination, astrology, occultism, and forms of spiritual direction were not only seen as useless but also harmful, because they may encourage a search within for the spirit beyond the restrictions imposed by the regime. Besides, the Nazi regime was based on an unyielding materialist and functionalist philosophy in terms of human resources. Society existed as a machine in which each individual was expected to serve specific functions either military or industrial. According to such an ideology, anything religious that could not be converted into state policy especially those encouraging a single person or inner propensity towards life was seen as unnecessary or even devastating. Mystical traditions, particularly those with an esoteric bent, placed the individual in dialogue with metaphysical forces outside the state's control, potentially exercising free will and religious autonomy something the Nazi state constantly tried to stamp out.<sup>12</sup>

The fear of the potential risk that these activities posed led to campaigns of repression against spiritualists, occultists, and astrologers, especially during political and military crises. These activities were most often associated with "foreign"

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<sup>11</sup> Kater, M. H. *The Nazi Party: A Social Profile of Members and Leaders, 1919-1945*. Cambridge 1983: Harvard University Press.

<sup>12</sup> Proctor, R. N. *Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis*. Cambridge, MA 1988: Harvard University Press.



influences such as Judaism, international Freemasonry, or Bolshevism used as a cover for marginalization and repression. Thus, while the Nazi regime took some of the mystical elements selectively into its own thought, its overall stance toward independent mysticism was hostile because it was regarded as a threat to the discipline and order required by the new "scientific" and militarized order.<sup>13</sup>

### **The 'Witches' of the Third Reich**

The "witch" figure had a special place in Nazi imagination. Top Nazi SS leader Heinrich Himmler was particularly drawn to the witch persecution of medieval women and interpreted it as a Catholic Church conspiracy against "ancient German traditions." Himmler therefore established a special research institute dedicated to the collection of records of witch trials all over Germany, viewing the women who were persecuted as victims of a "Judeo-Christian" repression of ancient Germanic religiosity. Himmler believed that the murder of witches by the Catholic Church was just one stage in a broader movement of stripping the German people of their ancient tradition and imposing upon them a foreign, monotheistic religion whose interests were adverse to the "true" German spiritual tradition. For this reason, he tasked SS researchers and historians with the job of systematic documentation on medieval witch trials, establishing the Hexen-Sonderkommando a special committee tasked with mapping cases of female witch accusations and linking these cases to the persecution of German racial and spiritual traditions.<sup>14</sup>

This research study was based on witch trial records from across Germany and other regions of Europe, attempting to establish that the women accused and executed as witches were not evil occultists, but guardians of an ancient Germanic

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<sup>13</sup> Weindling, P. *Health, Race and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945*. Cambridge 1989: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Harrington, J. F., "Himmler's Witch Hunt", *History Today*, vol. 69, no. 9, 2019, pp. 10-17.

knowledge that was antithetical to "Judeo-Christian" values. Himmler believed most of these women were members of a spiritual elite, possessing knowledge of nature, healing, magic, and the inner principles of the world and that their extermination signified the loss of a valuable treasure of knowledge for the German people.<sup>15</sup>

Simultaneously, Himmler also sought to merge the cult of the "witch" into the ideational structure of the SS and provided her a new role: that of being a priestess of restored Germanic religiosity. In this regard, certain women from Nazi esoteric organizations or the SS ritual practice were viewed as spiritual heirs of the medieval witches and were integrated into ceremonies with the intention of restoring the ancient Germanic mystical tradition. Certain of these rituals involved the recreation of old pagan traditions, in which the woman played the role of an intermediary between human and natural forces.<sup>16</sup>

The "witch" of Nazi occultism was not only symbolically charged, but was drawn into a kind of racial revisionism that claimed the Catholic Church and the Inquisition had engaged in the systematic massacre of women of German descent as part of an ancient conspiracy to stifle German religious liberty. This perception enabled the propaganda of continuous historical persecution of Germans by foreign powers and contributed to the story of national re-emergence led by the Nazi leadership.<sup>17</sup>

Himmler, inspired by the dream of reviving a "pure" Germanic past, wanted to recast the witch from an image of victimized persecution to that of resistance and racial survival. In SS records, the "witch" was depicted as a woman possessing occult wisdom, who had access to an archaic lore of life and nature, and as a victim of foreign influences which had

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<sup>15</sup> Badger, W., & Purkiss, D., "English Witches and SS Academics: Evaluating Sources for the English Witch Trials in Himmler's Hexenkartothek", *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2017, pp. 125-157.

<sup>16</sup> Weitzel, F., *Die Gestaltung der Feste im Jahres- und Lebenslauf in der SS-Familie*. Wuppertal, 1989.

<sup>17</sup> Monter, W., "The Historiography of European Witchcraft: Progress and Prospects", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1972, pp. 435-451.

predominated medieval Europe. This revisionism was only one aspect of Nazism's broader effort to construct a counter-narrative of history that would be appropriate to its racial and ideological agenda. But at the same time, there were women who became members of the Nazi occult movement, accepting or even developing mystical and esoteric concepts in line with Nazi ideology. One of the best known was Savitri Devi (Maximine Portaz), a philosopher who advanced a belief that linked Nazism with Hinduism, viewing Hitler as a manifestation of the divine Vishnu and advocating a divine racial hierarchy. Her thinking was informed by Indian mysticism and doctrines of karma and reincarnation. Savitri Devi went to India, where she got involved with nationalist movements and wrote several books, the most visible among them being *The Lightning and the Sun*, in which she foresaw the re-establishment of the Aryan racial regime on the strength of an apocalyptic war which would restore nature's order to things. The philosophy of Savitri Devi was based on her conviction that the world is governed by a strict racial and spiritual law whereby the higher races have a divine mission to conquer and lead the rest of mankind. Influenced by Hindu notions of karma, she believed the Aryan people had fallen into decay due to racial mixture and moral degeneracy, and that they would require a purifying destruction if they were to regain "primordial purity." There, she declared that history works through three types of men: the men of lightning (vehicles of divine order and warlike superiority), the men of the sun (keepers of spiritual and racial purity), and the men of darkness, bringers of corruption, decay, and destruction of higher values.<sup>18</sup>

Her ideology was founded upon the belief that Adolf Hitler was a divine incarnation who had come to the world to lead the Aryans in the restoration of the natural order. She likened Hitler to the god Vishnu, to his final incarnation, Kalki, who, in Hindu mythology, at the end of each cosmic cycle, appears to destroy the degenerate world and prepare the way for a new golden age. She believed that the Second World War had been a necessary but incomplete attempt at this cosmic rebirth, and

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<sup>18</sup> Devi, S., *The Lightning and the Sun*. 1958.

that the struggle for the rebirth of the Aryan race was yet to be.<sup>19</sup>

After the defeat of Nazi Germany, Savitri Devi did not abandon her beliefs but rather dedicated herself to the guarding and spreading of Nazi mysticism, with a focus on the spiritual vision of National Socialism. She traveled all over Europe and the Middle East, where she encountered pro-Nazi groups and Hitler fans. In her post-war paintings, such as *Pilgrimage*, she describes going to sites associated with Hitler's life and activities and giving them a spiritual aura. She believed that Hitler's presence had left energetic imprints on these sites, and that devout Nazi believers might derive energy from going there.

In the 1950s, Savitri Devi deepened her associations with neo-Nazi movements and emerged as one of the first postwar esoteric Nazism figures. She collaborated with Otto Skorzeny and Hans-Ulrich Rudel, both escaped SS officers who fled to Latin America and were involved in efforts to restore the Nazi movement. She also associated closely with Colin Jordan and John Tyndall, leaders of British nationalism who attempted to resuscitate National Socialism in Europe.<sup>20</sup> Although deeply rooted in Nazi racial ideology, Savitri Devi's philosophy included strong mystical elements that set her apart from other postwar Nazis. Rather than political action in isolation, Devi preached an internal Nazism, for racial faith and spiritual devotion that was just as important as political action on the exterior. Towards this, she stressed education of the future generation especially because she was convinced that the revival of Nazism could not be achieved through war conquest by means but through a profound cultural and spiritual awakening.<sup>21</sup>

Devi believed that the Aryan race needed to be restored to the original Indo-European tradition, lost during Christianization and through the prevalence of the "degenerate" elements

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<sup>19</sup> Goodrick-Clarke, N., *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity*. New York 2002: New York University Press.

<sup>20</sup> Devi, S. & Fowler, R. G., *Forever and Ever: Devotional Poems*. Atlanta 2012: The Savitri Devi Archive.

<sup>21</sup> Evola, J., *Revolt Against the Modern World*. Rochester 1995: Inner Traditions.

of Western culture. In her opinion, the development of a new generation of demigods men and women who would achieve the ideal of the *Übermensch* was the only means through which the Aryan race could be preserved. Her vision of racial and spiritual purification was imbued with strong ascetic and isolating connotations, since she believed that unadulterated National Socialists should live as monastic-warriors, renouncing the moral precepts of modern society and the degradation of mass culture.<sup>22</sup>

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Other than Savitri Devi, some other prominent women who were engaged in Nazi mysticism include Gudrun Himmler, who was the daughter of Heinrich Himmler. Gudrun was brought up under the ideological environment of occult Nazism and remained dedicated to the ideology of Nazi mysticism through and after the fall of the regime. Her father, a passionate proponent of the revival of a pagan, racial religion, raised her on Aryan supremacist doctrine and mystical exercises tailored to the inner SS. Gudrun was active in *Stille Hilfe*, an organization that gave aid to fleeing Nazis after World War II,

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<sup>22</sup> Yockey, F. P., *Imperium: The Philosophy of History and Politics*. London 1948: The Dominion Press. Cf. Vavouras E. "Machiavelli's Ethics on Expansion and Empire", *Conatus* 2023, 8, pp. 703-723. <https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.35110>; Cf. Janssen J., "Ethics as a Means to Power", *Dia-noesis: A Journal of Philosophy*, 15, 2024, pp. 59-80, <https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.38166>

<sup>23</sup> Devi, S., *The Impeachment of Man*. Atlanta 2008: Noontide Press

and played a key role in perpetuating the occult and ideological dimensions of Nazism during the postwar period.<sup>24</sup>

Gudrun Himmler was not only an eye-witness to Nazi occultism during the postwar era but a prominent member of the effort to preserve and rebuild the ideological and esoteric elements of Nazi mysticism. Gudrun grew up within an environment where racial purity and spiritual renewal were accepted as fundamental principles, and accordingly, developed early on a fanatical love for her father and for the "mission" of the Third Reich. *Stille Hilfe* ("Silent Help") was the main means through which Gudrun Himmler remained in service to Nazi ideology. The group was initially formed to help fugitive SS officers and other Nazi leaders who were being pursued as war criminals. Practically, however, it was also a kernel for the preservation of the esoteric elements of Nazi ideology because many of those protected by the organization were individuals directly associated with occultism and the racial-mystical teachings of Nazism. *Stille Hilfe* ("Silent Help") was the main means through which Gudrun Himmler remained in service to Nazi ideology. The group was initially formed to help fugitive SS officers and other Nazi leaders who were being pursued as war criminals. Practically, however, it was also a kernel for the preservation of the esoteric elements of Nazi ideology because many of those protected by the organization were individuals directly associated with occultism and the racial-mystical teachings of Nazism.<sup>25</sup>

Gudrun herself never doubted that her father and his vision of the resurrection of the Aryan race were an unfinished mission. It is because of this that she sought to create a cultural continuity of Nazi mysticism through the dissemination of the racial doctrines to which she was subjected as a child. She participated in secret meetings of former Nazis after the war, where

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<sup>24</sup> Schröm, O., & Röpke, A. *Stille Hilfe für braune Kameraden: Das geheime Netzwerk der Alt- und Neonazis*. Berlin 2002: Ch. Links Verlag.

<sup>25</sup> Lebert, N., & Lebert, S., *My Father's Keeper: Children of Nazi Leaders—An Intimate History of Damage and Denial* 2001 Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

ritual elements of occult Nazism were reenacted in a bid to preserve the lost legacy of the Reich.<sup>26</sup>

Apart from her clandestine activities, Gudrun also engaged in spreading the ideology through official channels of propaganda. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, she began to pen pieces and for neo-Nazi and the revival of Himmler's occult ideology-related publications. She reinstated in her work the myth that the SS was not just a military formation instead, an "order of initiates," tasked with the defense of Aryan wisdom. Her obsession with salvaging her father's occult activities encouraged her to collaborate with many circles of neo-Nazi esotericists, particularly in Germany and Austria. By virtue of these affiliations, she ensured that the ideas that had been passed to her would not die but, instead, pass on to the next generation of Nazi esotericism followers. She personally stayed in contact with former SS personnel who had fled to Latin America and preferred an international network of Nazi and occultist groups to be formed.<sup>27</sup>

Over the years, Gudrun Himmler gained a reputation among neo-Nazi groups as the "daughter of the Order" a figure of almost sacred status, the final living connection to the Nazi occult inner circle. Despite the transformation of postwar German society and the prosecution of right-wing extremist groups, she managed to maintain influence, particularly through the continued activities of Stille Hilfe, which provided support to former SS members and funded legal defenses for war criminals arrested decades after World War II.<sup>28</sup>

Until the final years of her life, Gudrun Himmler was a stubborn supporter of her father's ideology. Even when the operations of Stille Hilfe began to be discovered by German authorities and were deemed illegal, she insisted she was simply defending "innocent men" who had served Germany. She never

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<sup>26</sup> Hauck, S. A., *Hyperaktive Kinder zur Stille führen mit Hilfe musiktherapeutischer Techniken: Eine empirische Studie in der Grundschule*. Norderstedt 2007: Books on Demand.

<sup>27</sup> Gerosa, K., *Das karge Leben: Vom harten Los der Bergbauern in Südtirol: Fünfundzwanzig Jahre Stille Hilfe für Südtirol e.V.* (Rosenheimer Raritäten). Rosenheim 1995: Rosenheimer Verlagshaus.

<sup>28</sup> Levenda, P., *Unholy Alliance: A History of Nazi Involvement with the Occult* (New and Expanded Edition). New York 2002: Continuum.

expressed regret over her beliefs and, until her death, was a believer in the racial-mystical ideology of the SS.<sup>29</sup>

Another female figure that was involved in Nazi occultism was Maria Orsic, and she led the Vril Gesellschaft. From some available records and conjecture, the Vril Society had a relation to the Thule Gesellschaft and was part of research that tried to find means of contacting supernatural or alien life, as well as utilizing occult forces for designing Nazi technology. Maria Orsic is said to have had a strong impact in certain SS circles, but the details about her activities are still controversial, with some regarding the stories about her as postwar occult mythologies.<sup>30</sup>

The contradictory nature of accounts on Maria Orsic presents it difficult to fully establish her role in the Nazi occult world. According to some reports, at her direction, the Vril Gesellschaft developed an esoteric code based on the unification of the ancient Germanic and Eastern mystic traditions to awaken a supranormal power associated with the Aryan race. They believe that Orsic was well aware of ancient wisdom and occult practices that might either initiate a higher energy known as Vril, believed by her sect followers to be an essential force likely to change the world.<sup>31</sup>

These theories assert that Orsic was well versed in ancient knowledge and magical practices that were able to evoke a higher energy known as Vril, something that the members of her cult believed to be one of the key forces that could re-create the world. These allegations are not founded on formal documents, but on a number of unauthenticated reports that Orsic was in constant contact with top SS officials intrigued by the occult possibilities of the Vril Gesellschaft. Some of these reports say that the group had tested telepathic communication experiments with a view to communicating with extraterrestrial or supernatural entities which could provide them with

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<sup>29</sup> Ryback, T. W., *Takeover: Hitler's Final Rise to Power*. New York 2022: Basic Books.

<sup>30</sup> De Lafayette, M., *Maria Orsic, Nikola Tesla, Their Extraterrestrial Messages, Occult UFOs*. New York 2011: Times Square Press.

<sup>31</sup> De Lafayette, M., *Maria Orsic, the Woman Who Originated and Created Earth's First UFOs. Vol. 2*. New York 2013: Times Square Press.



technology for the purpose of creating advanced weaponry systems.<sup>32</sup>

They claim that Orsic and the Vril Gesellschaft also had access to a system of sacred symbols and ancient texts through which they deciphered communications transmitted from a realm greater than earth. These messages were said to include blueprints for the building of aircraft based on anti-gravity principles designs that, according to some theories, were the source of the so-called "Nazi UFOs," a postwar urban myth claiming that Nazi Germany developed advanced flying machines using extraterrestrial or supernatural technology. Although no historical accounts verify these speculations, Maria Orsic is regarded by Nazi occult sympathizers as the central figure in the effort to discover "ancient forces" that might be utilized in the establishment of a new Aryan empire. Her mythology depicts her as a charismatic, almost otherworldly woman, believed to know secret things and to have been initiated into mystery rituals, where participants sought to access the power of the universe through meditation, symbolic patterns, and energetic codes.<sup>33</sup>

One of the most widely circulated rumors about Orsic is that she disappeared under mysterious circumstances shortly before the fall of the Third Reich. There are some theories that the Vril Gesellschaft disbanded in 1945, as the war was already being lost for Nazi Germany, and that Orsic herself left Berlin under unknown circumstances. Later rumors placed her in secret Nazi facilities in South America, with some speculating that she escaped to an underground facility in Antarctica another theory closely associated with postwar occult mythology. Even though there is no concrete evidence of her doings, the myth of Orsic continues to be a subject of research and myth-making among those interested in Nazi occultism. These Vril stories have also been tied up in general conspiracy narratives about hidden technologies, secret esoteric knowledge, and continuations of Nazi occult ideologies post-World War II. Orsic

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<sup>32</sup> Sepehr, R., *Occult Secrets of Vril: Goddess Energy and the Human Potential*. Los Angeles 2019: Atlantean Gardens.

<sup>33</sup> De Lafayette, M., *Extraterrestrials Messages to Maria Orsic in Ana'kh Aldebaran Script to Build the Vril*. New York 2013: Times Square Press.

has alternately been presented as some mystical individual restoring former Aryan capabilities, or mythologized person invented in an effort to serve post-war continuity with occult Nazism.<sup>34</sup>

Additionally, there were women who participated in mystical rituals conducted by the inner circle of the SS, designed to reinforce racial cohesion and promote an inner discipline inspired by ancient Germanic and Indo-European traditions. These women were either the wives of high-ranking SS officers or members of circles that supported the revival of pre-Christian German spirituality. In some cases, they assumed the role of priestesses in ceremonies connected to the SS solstice celebrations an attempt to link Nazi ideology to the pagan roots of Germany.<sup>35</sup>

The involvement of women in Nazi occultism proves to be a multi-faceted dynamic in which some engaged actively in seeking metaphysical and mystical explanations justifying the Nazi racial order and others used these ideas to underpin postwar Nazi mythologies. The interconnectedness of Nazi mysticism with the search for a higher order and its upkeep even after the war proves that these women were involved in the maintenance of the occult dimension of the Nazi vision.<sup>36</sup>

### **Philosophical Aspects of Female Mysticism and Nazi Gender Ideology**

Nazi ideology was founded on a patriarchal concept of gender, in which the woman's solitary paramount function was mother and bearer of racial procreation. Any activity outside this function highly independent spiritual activity was problematic since it held the possibility of deviance from the ideologically strictly defined pathway advocated by the Nazi

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<sup>34</sup> Stanley, M., *Maria Orsic: Winged Muse*. New York 2020: Independently Published.

<sup>35</sup> Alabaster, L., *Maria Orsic: The Orsic Project*. New York 2020: Independently Published.

<sup>36</sup> Thor, V., Krone, C., et al., *The Path of Vril: Venusian Secrets of Longevity and Rejuvenation*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018.

regime. Female spirituality, except when mobilized for racial reproduction or the affirmations of mass National Socialist identity, was in doubt, more frequently associated with liberal or even disintegrating forces. The regime's concern with the biological role of women accompanied a more general rejection of women's autonomy, whether within the sphere of labor or within the sphere of spiritual and cultural expression.<sup>37</sup>

Nazi propaganda constructed a system of domination over the female role by promoting a double image: the "ideal" woman was the mother, loyal wife, dedicated to family and fatherland; meanwhile, any manifestation of female spiritual independence could be labeled as degenerate or subversive. Nazi policy here tightly restricted women's education and access to knowledge and instead reinforced a discussion that equated femininity with the domestic and reproductive sphere.<sup>38</sup>

Nazi biopolitics here drew upon knowing women as racial purifiers, positioning women at the centre of the nationalist discourse. Lebensborn initiatives reinforced this policy further by promoting the production of "racially pure" children and deterring women from any pursuit that was not aimed at bringing this about. At the same time, any religious quest that could not be reconciled with the state-sanctioned National Socialist way was relegated to the sidelines as it was viewed as threatening the homogeneity and discipline of the German nation.<sup>39</sup>

The idealistic conception of femininity as a state servant and racial servant excluded the possibility of independent self-realization outside the duties reserved for women. Individuals desiring an active role in mental existence or independent religious traditions were eyed with distrust since they were considered to be jeopardizing the very foundation of the National Socialist state. Fearing any form of uncontrolled spiritual

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<sup>37</sup> Roland, P., *Nazi Women of the Third Reich: Serving the Swastika*. London 2020: Arcturus Publishing.

<sup>38</sup> Roland, P., *Nazi Women: The Attraction of Evil*. London 2018: Arcturus Publishing.

<sup>39</sup> Wyllie, J., *Nazi Wives: The Women at the Top of Hitler's Germany*. London 2020: St. Martin's Press.

activity, the Nazi government enforced strict control over cultural and intellectual life, removing women from knowledge production sites and confining them to a passive reproductive role in society.<sup>40</sup>

Philosophically, the suppression of women's mysticism can be interpreted as a reaction to women's independent thinking and experience. Mysticism was an area of expression that was beyond the control of male science and male religion. The Nazi effort to control or repress such a practice, then, can be seen as a reflection of the regime's overall repressive machinery against other forms of knowledge and power. Nazi ideology was built on a strictly hierarchical world view, where all forms of knowledge and social function had to be accommodated within the racial and nationalist program. Mysticism and other competing knowledges were a danger to this order because they contained subjective experience and inner spiritual practices that could not be controlled or directed by the state.<sup>41</sup>

Feminine mysticism, in particular, provided women with a means through which they could achieve a form of religious independence outside of their limited place within National Socialist society. In a philosophy where women were predominantly described as racial reproduction carriers and defenders of male dominance, any form of religious endeavor that was not advantageous to these interests was seen as dangerous. Mystical knowledge was often at odds with the Nazi ideal of "correct" scientific and ideological education, as it was typically not transmitted through institutionalized, male-dominated networks, but through personal experience, ritual, and inner insight.<sup>42</sup>

The suppression of women's mysticism not only entailed the direct eradication of independent spiritual movements but also encompassed the destruction of any narrative that portrayed

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<sup>40</sup> Stephenson, J., *Women in Nazi Germany*. New York 2001: Pearson Education.

<sup>41</sup> Eischeid, S. J., Lagelee, E., & al., *Mistress of Life and Death: The Dark Journey of Maria Mandl, Head Overseer of the Women's Camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau*. New York 2023: Independently Published.

<sup>42</sup> Brown, D. P., *The Camp Women: The Female Auxiliaries Who Assisted the SS in Running the Nazi Concentration Camp System*. Atglen 2002: Schiffer Publishing.

women as independent spiritual agents. Women who claimed access to knowledge outside the state-run framework were considered dangerous, as they undermined the dogmatic construction of reality used by the Nazi state. Occult and mystical movements which allowed women to access direct spiritual experience independent of male-controlled institutions were targeted by both state repression and propagandistic mechanisms.<sup>43</sup>

Philosophically, what can be said of the strategy is in terms of epistemological control that is, an attempt by the Nazi state to circumscribe and define allowable types of knowledge. Women's mysticism based on experiential knowledge of the world rather than on the positivist, linear thinking promoted by the regime was a different type of knowledge that was inevitably undisciplined. In National Socialist ideology, all that was known had to be functional in relation to specific goals, primarily racial and social purity. Anything working outside these parameters was considered to be dangerous to the maintenance of ideological discipline.<sup>44</sup>

The control of female spirituality by the banning or prohibiting of other types of knowledge is a part of a broader Nazi state policy to absolutely limit the boundaries of what was permitted in society. The woman, potentially able to access an independent worldview in the context of female mysticism, needed to be returned to the austere National Socialist system, where her only recognized value resided in her racial and biological role. When such reintegration was out of the question, spiritual questioning itself came to be targeted, either by explicit acts of repression or by propagandistic stigmatization of mystical thought as irrational and subversive.<sup>45</sup>

So understood, Nazi policy on female mysticism was more than a question of sexism or authoritarianism, but a question of control of knowledge and control of thought. The

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<sup>43</sup> Hahn Beer, E., & Dworkin, S., *The Nazi Officer's Wife: How One Jewish Woman Survived the Holocaust*. New York 1999: William Morrow.

<sup>44</sup> Anděl, S., *Aufseherin: Women of the Third Reich*. New York 2020: Independently Published.

<sup>45</sup> Harvey, E., *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization*. New Haven 2003: Yale University Press.

suppression of women's spiritual autonomy and the reduction of femininity to biological reproduction alone were indispensable tools for the preservation of the ideological purity of the regime. Thus, the destruction of female mystical traditions was not merely an attack on women's status, but also a calculated effort to construct a monolithic, state-controlled system of thinking a system where there could be no room for other ways of comprehending the world.<sup>46</sup>

### Conclusion

The study of the intersection between female mysticism and Nazi ideology is that of the more deeply and more complexly problematic enough to involve both the employment of occultism as an ideological construction tool and the suppression of women's religious agency. While the Nazi state selectively drew on mystical elements to be used in its racial and cosmological ideology, it maintained strict control over manifestations of spirituality, particularly when these conflicted with the ideological discipline of the state. When the woman was introduced as a priestess of racial purity or as an intermediary of lost Germanic spirituality, she was tolerated and incorporated into the propagandistic narrative. But when her spiritual journey took on autonomous aspects and was no longer dedicated to National Socialist goals, it was considered perilous and likely to be shunned or repressed.

This paradox is a microcosm of the broader Nazi ideology of knowledge, power, and gender. Nazism's effort to control thought and spirituality was not unique to the female experience—it was part of a broader agenda to construct a monolithic, state-controlled world in which inner life and individual questioning were perceived as dangers. Female mysticism, with its experiential form of knowledge, affinity for natural and metaphysical forces, and access to a tradition outside the control of contemporary power relations, was an unacceptable alternative one that had to be absorbed or effaced.

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<sup>46</sup> Adele-Marie, W., *Women as Nazis: Female Perpetrators of the Holocaust*. New York 2020: Independently Published.

In the postwar period, the mystical and occult currents that had survived under Nazi ideology were themselves objects of investigation, reinterpretation, and mythologization. The female practitioners of Nazi mysticism were deified by some postwar esoteric communities or excluded as survivals of a "degenerate" ideology that had been ultimately defeated. But the fact of their presence and their roles in the occult and ideological context of Nazism documents the deep interconnectedness of power, knowledge, and gender and the complexity of the relationship between mysticism and totalitarian regimes.

The philosophical dimension of this analysis transcends the historic conditions of Nazism and reveals a larger problem: the ongoing struggle between free spiritual inquiry and the need for authoritarian commands to define and impose kinds of knowledge and experience. Over time, feminine mysticism has been an alternative site of resistance to patriarchal and authoritarian commands. That even a state which tried to use occultism in an effort to root itself ideologically still repressed autonomous feminine spiritual activities is evidence that individual inner life can be a lasting threat to any attempt at monopolizing influence in the sphere of knowledge.

Therefore, the study of Nazi ideology and female mysticism is less an exercise in historical contemplation, but rather a scholarly inquiry into the tension dynamic of politics, gender, and religion. It is in this perspective that it will be readily obvious that any attempt at creating an authoritarian model of existence will eventually be confronted with its own internal paradoxes.

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